

The native Florida bromeliad or wild-pine,  
Tillandsia fasciculata

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Several genera of bromeliads (members of the family Bromeliaceae, the pineapple family), including Tillandsia, are native to Florida. Of these, probably the showiest species is Tillandsia fasciculata Swartz (1,2,3,4) (Fig. 1). It can be seen flowering mainly in spring and early summer on cypress, oak, and certain other trees in the swamps and hammocks of the southern part of peninsular Florida. It is currently reasonably abundant, but is being harvested commercially in large quantities.



Fig. 1. Tillandsia fasciculata growing on a cypress tree  
in Collier County. (D.P.I. Photo 701672).

**DESCRIPTION:** Plant essentially stemless; leaves many in a rosette; rosettes solitary or few in a cluster; leaves 3-7 dm (1 dm = 4 in. approx.) long, stiff, recurved-spreading, dilated at base, long tapering above to an involute, pointed tip, imbricated forming a cup, blades lepidote scaly, grayish green, brownish at base; flowering scape solitary, erect or ascending, 3-6 dm tall, fasciculate with several to many spikes 7-15 cm long, bracts of scape similar to leaves except smaller, floral bracts yellowish or usually red to rose, ovate-acute, loosely imbricate, 3-3.5 cm long; flowers partially covered by bracts, petals violet or rarely white, 4.5 cm long, stamens and style exserted; capsule 3 cm long, cylindric, seeds comatose, windborne. Cypress swamps and hammocks, epiphytic.

DISCUSSION: The bromeliad, *T. fasciculata*, is a common and spectacular sight in the interior swamps and hammocks from the southern parts of Osceola and Polk Counties southward. The brightly colored floral bracts in shades of yellow, red, and rose remain showy for several weeks, fading to green only as the seed pods near maturity. The beauty of these plants in flower, which often rivals the best in a bromeliad fancier's greenhouse, has resulted in a great demand for this bromeliad.

Commercial collectors harvest these plants by the truckload, mainly from private land. Many conservationists have expressed fears that this harvest rate exceeds the renewal rate. If this is so, it will eventually become a rare or truly endangered species. For this reason it was listed in Section 581.185, Florida Statutes, as endangered in order to provide a legal means to regulate harvest and sale of this spectacular species. This law requires both written permission of the landowner and a permit issued by the Division of Plant Industry in order to harvest, transport, or sell these plants.

A serious problem with this bromeliad is that, unlike many other bromeliads, it will not grow in soil. It can be grown successfully only when placed strictly as an epiphyte on a plaque, tree branch, or other suitable support having excellent drainage. Some plants offered for sale have been small plants placed in pots, shells or other containers with soil, peat, or moss. Others have been stapled to a plaque, often through the bud area. Either of the preceding is likely to result in rapid death of the plant. Instead of the above methods, the plant should be tied to the support with nylon cord. With this procedure and careful attention to water, light, and protection from freezing, plants should stand a good chance of surviving and growing.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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